

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 377 737

FL 022 726

AUTHOR Saito, Yoshiko
TITLE The MBA and Japanese Language: Toward Proficiency-Oriented Language Instruction.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (13th, Ypsilanti, MI, April 13-16, 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Administration Education; *Business Communication; Change Strategies; College Second Language Programs; *Competency Based Education; Educational Change; Higher Education; *Japanese; *Language Proficiency; Languages for Special Purposes; Masters Programs; Second Language Instruction; *Second Languages
IDENTIFIERS Authentic Materials

ABSTRACT

It is proposed that Master's in Business Administration (MBA) degree programs integrate Japanese language instruction in order to train business people to be sensitive to cultural differences and capable of operating effectively and comfortably in Japanese environments. The discussion begins by presenting some issues concerning traditional MBA program design and traditional liberal arts Japanese language programs, then discusses the importance of integrating the two disciplines. In particular, it is argued that neither program is sufficient in itself to prepare young Americans for the global market. The next section addresses the need for new instructional approaches to language instruction suitable for MBA students, particularly the need for authentic materials to develop practical language skills. Finally, the value of integrating cultural components into such curricula is discussed, and the importance of appropriate teacher training is highlighted. An additional recommendation is that two years of language study be a prerequisite for entry into an international MBA program and/or that an intensive language course begin before the MBA program itself, followed by a foreign internship and further language study during the program. Contains 27 references. (MSE)

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The MBA and Japanese Language:
Toward Proficiency-Oriented Language Instruction

Yoshiko Saito

Assistant Professor

Coordinator of Japanese Language

University of Texas at Austin

Dept of OALL

2601 University Avenue

Austin, TX. 78712

(512) 471-1365 (office)

(512) 345-8616 (home)

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More college students in the United States are studying foreign languages than ever before, with Japanese, Russian, and Spanish showing the highest growth in enrollment, according to the results of a survey taken in 1990 by the Modern Language Association (Brod, 1988; MLA, 1991). The study of Japanese as a foreign language in the U. S. has been growing steadily for the past three decades, and since 1986 the percentage of students studying the Japanese language has increased more rapidly than the overall growth of students attending college.

According to the MLA survey, there were 1,746 students enrolled in Japanese classes in 1960, but the number rose steadily to 23,454 in 1986 and has increased significantly since then. The survey showed that the number of students studying Japanese in 1990 had risen to 45,717, a remarkable 94.9% growth in just five years, the highest percentage increase among all foreign languages taught in the U. S., followed by Russian (30.7%) and Spanish (29.7%).

This skyrocketing increase in Japanese enrollment seems to be a response to Japan's economic success, a success that can be attributed in part to the willingness of the Japanese to learn the language and culture of their target markets without relying on translators or their counterparts' language ability. This observation has important implications for international management programs at the graduate level in U.S. universities. The training of young business people who are sensitive to cultural differences and capable of operating comfortably and effectively in foreign environments has become an absolute

priority for American business and thus for MBA programs. Integrating Japanese language study and MBA programs so that students who are motivated to learn can utilize their acquired language ability and cultural knowledge as a tool for their successful career development is critical to America's role in today's global economy.

What does it take to bring about such an integration? This article first presents some issues concerning traditional MBA programs and traditional liberal arts Japanese language programs, and then discusses the importance of integrating the two different disciplines. The next section addresses the vital need for new instructional approaches that can meet the challenge of implementing a language program suitable for MBA students, particularly the need for using authentic materials for classroom instruction for developing practical language skills. Finally, I discuss the value of integrating cultural components in curricula and the importance of teacher training.

Traditional MBA programs and language study

For the past few decades, MBA programs have emphasized the quantifiable and measurable in the broadly defined areas of management, such as management science, finance, and accounting. They have placed relatively less emphasis on the human side of managing people. Recent reports in the media indicate that corporate America has become dissatisfied with overpriced MBA graduates who are good at manipulating numbers but weak in the interpersonal skills needed to motivate workers and to generate true productivity (Haddad, 1992). International management requires more than clever accounting strategies. MBA programs that focus on international management must allow sufficient

time in their curriculum for students to study language and culture and thus learn how to work with people from other countries.

Neither the traditional business curricula nor traditional foreign language instruction is sufficient to meet the needs of young Americans preparing to compete in a global market. Grosse (1983) noted about 10 years ago that the importance of communications and understanding between business and foreign language faculties should be emphasized as an important step toward any meaningful integration. In her study she found that both foreign language and business faculty agreed that traditional foreign language course offerings do not meet the needs of business students; consequently, business faculty are not willing to require foreign language in a graduate business curriculum which is already filled with many requirements.

Unfortunately, after 10 years the situation remains the same. The reasons cited are time constraints to complete the MBA program and the students' negative perception toward language learning in general (Stone and Rubinfeld, 1989). Survey results by Stone and Rubinfeld explain how business students perceive the role of foreign language study. They surveyed students enrolled in the business schools of five geographically dispersed public universities. Among 306 students, only one-fourth of the students chose to enroll in college-level language courses and they frequently had other, non-business related reasons for doing so, including the "desire to learn another language" and the "expectation of foreign travel." Those who decided not to enroll in foreign language courses seemed to have been influenced by negative foreign language experience in high school. They perceived that foreign language study is time consuming, less

rewarding, and more difficult than other course work. This attitude toward foreign language is also reflected in MBA curricula.

In contrast to the overall negative perception toward language learning, enrollment in Japanese language courses has grown markedly. Who are the students learning Japanese and why do they decide to enroll in Japanese courses? A survey conducted by National Foreign Language Center with 624 post-secondary students illustrates that the increased enrollment in Japanese language seems to be linked to a strong instrumental motivation such as "to be able to use job-related Japanese" or "to improve job/career opportunities." Their most important focus of interest in Japanese listed "business" at the top followed by "culture." Their expectations of employment is "business" followed by "government" and "science/technology" (Jorden with Lambert, 1991).

In addition to the Japanese- and Asian-related fields, a significant proportion of these new students are coming from the business and science fields, and a majority of all students, regardless of their fields, see Japanese language ability as an absolute necessity for their own career development in the emerging global economy. Because their motivation and goals for language learning are focused on immediate practical usage, traditional programs that are geared to sort out and groom prospective Japanese majors do not meet their needs.

Graduates of MBA programs with traditional curricula are now facing difficulties in finding jobs (Deutschman, 1992). The MBA labor market has been saturated with graduates who have focused on the finance and accounting areas, but today there seems to be more demand for people with hands on management ability.

International management programs have been around for many years, but the new interest seems to be driven by the convergence of two forces. One is the perception by many that America must improve its international competitiveness. Second is the desire on the part of business schools to develop programs that meet today's needs and result in good job prospects for their graduates. An MBA program with an international dimension is seen in this light. MBA graduates with people skills, cultural knowledge, and good foreign language skills are poised to compete in the global economy.

Language Instruction Directed Toward Practical Skills

Why are traditional language programs not attractive to many students? What type of foreign language program will meet today's needs? Since large corporations often consider foreign language and international studies skills as a tool to be used in support of functional business knowledge (Lambert, 1992; Saito, 1992a), what students need is effective, practical language and culture courses relevant to their needs within their time limitations. It must be acknowledged that only so much can be done with college-level language courses, and this is even more the case with teaching Japanese since most students have no foundation of previous study from high school and must start from the beginning. It is almost impossible to bring these students to professional fluency within the time frame that MBA students can devote to language study. Consequently, language instruction focused in practical skills is very pertinent to enable students to acquire functional ability and have a positive language experience while building a foundation for lifetime learning.

The aim of language instruction of this kind is to enable students to perform practical tasks such as reading a menu and ordering food, buying train tickets, or leaving a telephone message. From this practical foundation (McGinnis and Ke, 1992; Okazaki and Okazaki, 1990), they can advance to more sophisticated tasks, such as interviewing for jobs and reviewing technical reports or writing business letters related to their field.

A fundamental and important consideration in language teaching is that students are more motivated if they recognize that what they are learning is truly usable (Bacon and Finnemann, 1990; Nostrand, 1989; and Westphal, 1986). If they can project themselves into the hypothetical situation, they can see the value of learning related vocabulary or grammatical rules (Saito and Abbott, 1993). If students are introduced to a sentence within the context of Japanese business introductions, for example, "My name is Smith," they need to learn the reasons for using their last name rather than their first name. Also, since the politeness structure of Japanese shifts depending on the relative levels of the speakers, they have to understand how to introduce themselves when they are visiting with a older person, or if they are in a different situation such as at coffee shop or a wedding reception. If students are asked to apply their learning in meaningful contexts, their efforts with the language will be a more rewarding experience.

For American learners of Japanese, basic proficiency requires an understanding of the distance between the social and cultural contexts of America and Japan, which is probably greater than between America and other Western cultures. The field of teaching Japanese as a foreign language must recognize that extra time is required by learners of Japanese to gain proficiency, in both visual

processing of Japanese text and in understanding Japanese social and cultural contexts. In this sense, it becomes very clear that Japanese language programs must be coupled with multi-disciplinary coursework to support the learner. MBA students are generally successful learners and are highly motivated. They will find stimulating support for their language study from courses about such topics as technology, economics, marketing, or finance in contemporary Japan.

In Japanese reading instruction, the orthography switch is a matter of particular concern for both teachers and students. Reading involves not only the processing of larger textual features such as syntax, but also requires extra-text based information such as intercultural perception, prior knowledge and metacognition (Bernhardt, 1987). It needs to be remembered that reading in Japanese involves more than a transfer of writing systems. It introduces the readers to an entirely new set of cultural and social contexts which are implicit in any written text.

The Use of Authentic Materials

Materials chosen for the purpose of developing practical language skills are very important. The following general assumptions underlying today's available materials need to be reevaluated: 1) Japanese language is very difficult to learn because of its different writing system; 2) the mastery of spoken Japanese can be most effectively achieved by separating it from learning the written form of the language; 3) reading and writing of any kanji--the ideograph system derived from Chinese characters--must be learned simultaneously; 4) kanji with fewer strokes are easier to learn than kanji with many strokes; 5) strategies employed by nonnative readers should be similar to natives. Textbooks

and language-learning materials currently available to teachers of Japanese tend to reinforce these assumptions, even though many instructors have begun to question them (Harada, 1988; Koda, 1992; Saito, 1992b). There is at present little data to support any of these ideas about how Japanese orthography should be introduced to students, but the lack of data also frustrates efforts to develop new approaches.

The use of authentic materials in Japanese language training is essential from the beginning of Japanese language instruction. There has been strong debate among Japanese language instructors and much concern that the use of authentic materials in elementary Japanese language courses is an ideal but ultimately unrealistic objective because of the complexity of the writing system (Jorden with Lambert, 1991). This school of thought is concerned that authentic materials will intimidate and overload students, and it holds that Japanese learning is more effective if proficiency first emerges from competency in learning to understand spoken Japanese through study of Japanese transliterated into the Roman alphabet, a system known as Romaji. Unfortunately, though, when students are later introduced to authentic Japanese characters they must try to unlearn and abandon their Romaji crutch, and that can be very difficult and may inhibit further learning. Avoiding this pitfall is exactly why students should be exposed to authentic materials from the outset. As L2 researchers (Lee, 1987; Allen, Bernhardt, Berry, & Demel, 1988) argue, L2 instructors tend to underestimate students' potential for understanding of authentic materials. College students can handle both the kanji and the two kana systems, hiragana and katakana, which are phonetic spellings of Japanese words in Japanese script, and often delight in mastering something truly new and challenging.

Those L2 researchers constantly remind us that L2 students are able to handle authentic texts as long as the selection of materials reflects the cognitive and content background of adult learners. Authentic materials are content rich: menus, train timetables, and movie or product ads transmit information to adult minds and by processing information about the total culture, they help to develop fundamental reading strategies which are somewhat different from strategies derived from experience in Western languages. As students' language levels increase, they should be encouraged to read about familiar topics with longer texts such as financial reports, marketing information, business correspondence and newspapers.

Current technology has a lot to offer language instruction aiming at the development practical skills, but unfortunately foreign language teachers have been slow to take full advantage of the technology that is available today. Great improvements in the capabilities and user friendliness of technologies make it easier for teachers to incorporate the benefits of technologies in various ways.

SCOLA (Satellite Communications for Learning), for example, brings current news and programming to the classroom via satellite transmission. Students can experience and learn authentic information through visual contexts in classrooms without actually going to Japan. Various TV segments including commercial advertisements are excellent materials to teach authentic language and the contemporary culture of Japan, which, due to the dynamic pace of modern life, cannot always be found in textbooks (Liskin-Gasparro, 1990 & Ogawa, 1990).

All levels of students, even beginners, can take advantage of these materials. A short airline commercial for example, presenting a list of destination countries in Japanese, gives students listening and reading practice when they are studying katakana, the kana system used for foreign words. Teachers can then expand this topic further by providing rules for how foreign words are pronounced in Japanese. MBA students who are planning for an internship program in Japan can be better prepared by becoming familiar with Japanese society and knowing what they can expect when they go to Japan.

While personal computers have proven very effective in the teaching of many languages, software for Japanese instruction has been slow in coming because of the complex writing system. Japanese requires its own operating system to display Japanese fonts. Current technologies are moving toward universal or world-wide operating systems, such as Apple Computer's "WorldScript™ (Bortman, 1992)," which should make multilingual use of computers easier for both teachers and students. As computers become more commonly used by students, Japanese language teachers should be encouraged to both adopt and develop software for implementing curricula with a practical focus.

Ausubel, Novak, and Hanesian (1978) tells us that meaningful learning comes from association with the learner's experience and cognitive maturity. Media can be an effective device for relating to the learner's experience by providing various forms of organizers. In interactive video, for example, the combination of computer-assisted learning with video, provide learners with simulations of reality and a sense of authenticity which is often missing in

classroom activity. Interaction between the computer and the learner provides pragmatic experience in a simulated situation. The interaction with visual images also provides the opportunity to learn body language, facial expressions, registers and styles and rules of conversation and communication in a target-language culture. These interactive programs seem to have a great impact on learners' development of communicative competence.

Teacher development

The need for constant attention to teacher development is a formidable task for the language programs, particularly in light of the new and often highly specific demands of MBA students. A study conducted by Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) reviewed and analyzed the literature of teacher education in foreign language from 1977 to 1987, and concluded that research concerned with teacher development has been conceptually weak and deficient in empirical data. In the case of Japanese instruction, there is a crucial need for teacher preparation.

The results of a survey conducted by the National Foreign Language Center in 1991 describes the current state of preparation of teachers of Japanese (Jordan with Lambert, 1991). Among 131 nationwide respondents, 76.3% were native Japanese teaching at the post-secondary level, and 85% of the latter were relatively recent arrivals from Japan. Their academic preparation, however, showed a low educational profile; only 15.2 % of Japanese native speakers had achieved a professional rank of assistant, associate, or full professor, while 34.2 % of the non-Japanese had achieved that status. And the non-Japanese tend to teach courses in literature or substantive courses on Japan, in addition to Japanese language.

Among all respondents, approximately two-thirds indicated some training in teaching foreign languages (64.1%), in teaching Japanese as a foreign language (66.4%), and developing language teaching materials (58.0%). About one-third had no training at all in any of these categories. The nature of the training was not clear, but it ranged in length from less than one week to a year or more. In at least some cases, the longer periods of training were apparently on-the-job discussion meetings rather than formal courses. These data clearly show that there is a need for teacher development.

Generally speaking, at universities offering graduate study in Japanese, graduate students teach beginning and intermediate courses under the guidance of a coordinator. Many of these students are native speakers of Japanese who are taking courses in Japanese-related fields such as literature or linguistics; others, however, are involved in fields wholly unrelated to Japanese language or to teaching. For new students of Japanese, these teachers are their first significant human interface with Japanese language and culture. It is thus very important to prepare the graduate students to perform as competent teachers in proficiency-oriented programs. In order to maintain or raise their professional awareness, they need to know classroom teaching techniques and methods, and also some theory of first- and second-language acquisition. Additionally, they need to have extensive knowledge about Japanese language and culture which they can communicate in English. These graduate students are sincere, and, generally speaking, want to grasp techniques or ideas which they can immediately use in their classes. This type of hands-on experience and training seems to be encouraging, but at the same time they need to be exposed to theories of learning

and teaching from which effective instructional approaches are derived. Without such training, they tend to practice teaching the way they have learned their English in Japan (Monane, 1990), which is totally focused on preparation for university entrance examinations rather than proficiency. The development of proficiency oriented Japanese teachers, curricula, and materials is critical to winning the support of the Business schools and the world of business outside the university.

Conclusions and Projections

The growing interest in Japanese is a recognition by students of Japan's economic successes and most students taking Japanese express the hope that their language skills will help in their careers. In a time of heightened awareness of the need to be globally competitive, many graduate schools of business have added international management to their curricula, into which some schools are building a Japanese-language component.

Much of the literature discussing foreign language study and business school students emphasizes that there is not enough time in the curriculum for already busy students to add language study. For those who want to succeed in international business however, language study is necessary. Still, business school students and faculty tend to be results oriented and a Japanese language program integrated with the MBA curriculum must optimize time and produce a high degree of proficiency. This will require both institutional and student commitment.

One realistic possibility would be to acknowledge fully that an International MBA program is high-level professional education, and require two

years of language study prior to admission. Further study in both language and culture in the course of the MBA program could be coupled with an internship or a course of study in Japan to bring the students to a higher level of proficiency without compromising their business studies. One such plan would start the summer before the regular MBA program begins, with an intensive language and culture program in Japan followed by coursework during the school year and an internship and more language study in Japan during the second summer, reinforced by more courses during the second MBA year.

Japanese is considered a difficult language, but many students have demonstrated that it is possible to learn the language, and that the effort is satisfying and the results are rewarding. Japanese language programs are making progress in designing curricula and materials that are suitable for integration with MBA programs. It is also necessary for the business schools to make a serious commitment to practical language abilities for their international management graduates. As Japan is both America's partner and competitor in the global economy, it is vitally important that the relationships between the countries be healthy and vigorous. At this time the playing field is not level because too many Americans working with Japan are at a language disadvantage. International MBA programs with a concentration in Japanese studies are an idea whose time has come.

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